

# discussion

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## *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* and the construction of a unified field of tourism research

### Abstract

*The academic study of tourism has long suffered from deep inter and intra-disciplinary divides, which has often impeded its development, despite certain efforts by a few interdisciplinary publications to bridge these boundaries and constraints. The publication of the sweeping new Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies (2009), edited by Tazim Jamal and Mike Robinson, represents a step closer to the construction of a more unified, interdisciplinary genre of "tourism studies". In addition to serving as a reference text for tourism researchers of many disciplines, the reviewer argues that it explicitly helps establish a new field of research that transcends disciplinary boundaries in a way may be more effective than in the past. It does this first by thoroughly presenting the current state of tourism research from both the perspective of various disciplines (i.e., "the anthropology of tourism," "development studies and tourism") as well as through thematic, interdisciplinary perspectives. Second, more importantly than simply indexing the current state of affairs, the reviewer argues, it actually constructs this new "discipline" or field by bringing top and emerging scholars engaged in tourism research into meaningful engagement with each other under the marked title of "tourism studies" – a conscious effort, it seems, to processually create a more cohesive, interactive community of tourism scholars who may build on the contributions of their colleagues from across disciplinary divides.*

**Key words:** *tourism studies; tourism handbook; disciplinary boundaries; interdisciplinarity; sustainable tourism*

I remember when I first heard of Tazim Jamal and Mike Robinson's new volume, *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*. It was November 2009, and my wife and I were at a gala dinner in the Baroque Southern Italian town of Lecce celebrating the conclusion of a memorable conference on sustainable religious tourism, which was hosted by the Università del Salento, and organized by an international and interdisciplinary body of scholars from Europe and Israel. One of the keynote speakers, anthropologist Nelson Graburn – whom I like to consider one of the "grandfathers" of the social scientific study of tourism – eagerly pulled the newly minted, thick red book out of his bag and, bursting with enthusiasm, proudly showed it to the other keynote speaker, his colleague Jafar Jafari – another forefather of the discipline, who is best known for his role as the founding editor of the venerable journal, *The Annals of Tourism Research* and the editor of Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Tourism* (Jafari, 2000).

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The symbolism immediately was clear to me, as the two had collaborated before on a similar project back in 1991 when they co-edited a groundbreaking special issue of the *Annals* which summarized, discipline-by-discipline, the current state of the relatively nascent genre of "tourism research" within the social sciences (Graburn & Jafari, 1991). Graburn and Jafari had brought together some of the biggest names in each discipline at the time, including Valene Smith, Dennison Nash, Erick Cohen, and Peter Murphy. Yet what was striking about this issue was that each disciplinary paper had its own trajectory of research and community of scholars, with little overlap. This underscored what Echtner and Jamal (1997) would later call a "disciplinary dilemma" in tourism research, with clearly drawn boundaries between perspectives and little interface, integration, or exchange of theories and methods. At the time, it seems best anyone could hope for was for tourism research to meld together into two major disciplines: those dealing with tourism as an industry and those dealing with the more intangible, cultural dynamics of tourism (see Tribe, 1997).

As evidenced by the contributions in *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* under review here, a great deal has, of course, changed in the twenty years since that *Annals* issue. On the one hand, the disciplinary lines that were drawn in the *Annals* issue have become less prominent, though they are (somewhat regretfully) still present as researchers seem to persist in "reinventing the wheel" theoretically and methodologically (cf. Tribe, 2010). For example, qualitative research such as ethnography – the hallmark of anthropology, the discipline practiced by the early tourism scholars Graburn, Dennison Nash, and Valene Smith – has only recently become a widely accepted method for tourism managers and consultants, as well as those approaching tourism from economic, sociological, or even policy perspectives (cf. Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001) – and the same is true of certain types of quantitative methods and management theories for anthropologists. Likewise, intra-disciplinary boundaries still persist as well; students of pilgrimage, for example, often neglect tourism studies and vice-versa despite Turner and Turner's oft-cited adage, "a pilgrim is half a tourist if a tourist is half a pilgrim" (1978, p. 20; cf. Di Giovine, 2011). On the other hand, the 1990s and the 2000s were in many ways a turning point for the field; as the World Bank ceased funding tourism development projects, such endeavors fell in the hands of NGOs, global corporations, intergovernmental agencies, and local site managers whose differing needs and objectives led to the creation and proliferation of new and "alternative" forms of travel – from "eco-tourism," "adventure tourism" and "volunteer tourism" to "medical tourism," "culinary tourism" and "creative tourism." Their very specificity required academics to collaborate across disciplines, to bring in experts from non-tourism-related studies (such as climatologists, chefs, and doctors and healthcare administrators) – often leading them to reconceptualize what constitutes the very discipline.

While there are other texts that examine tourism at a relatively broad level (Van Harssel, 1994; Jafari, 2000; Franklin, 2003; Hall, 2004; Cooper, 2008; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009), in many ways, Jamal and Robinson's ambitious volume is the first in two decades to truly "update" that *Annals* issue. *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* is a valuable, indispensable contribution to the field for its thoughtful editing, well-chosen chapters, and thorough examination of the state of tourism research at the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Like the *Annals* issue, it is edited by two prolific and well-respected academics in the field – rare forms of highly collaborative scholar-practitioners whose wide-ranging publications are read and utilized inside and outside the university setting. Jamal, an associate professor at Texas A&M University in the United States, is perhaps best known for her work

on sustainability and community tourism planning (see, for example Jamal & Getz; Jamal & Stronza, 2009), while Robinson, the current director of the Ironbridge Institute at the University of Birmingham (U.K.), has established himself as a visible, and versatile, scholar and patron of tourism research in his former capacity as the Director of the innovative Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change (CTCC) at Leeds Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom – an exceptionally active international research institute that has helped produce some of the most thoughtful, theoretically grounded young tourism scholars today (cf. Di Giovine & Picard, 2010). Jamal and Robinson bring together in this laudable volume well-respected scholars from a variety of disciplines including anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, economists, political scientists, conservationists, and a range of tourism management experts. Like *The Annals of Tourism Research* in general, *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* is cross-disciplinary; the editors specifically point out that it does not favor one particular discipline, perspective or approach to the academic study of tourism, but rather is intended to broadly "provide academics across many disciplines with a definitive, critical, and indispensable resource and guide [that] seeks to reflect the wide-ranging conceptual approaches to the subject of tourism" (xvii). With such a goal, and at just over 700 pages, the editors clearly crafted for themselves a daunting task, but handled it well through a clear organizational system.

Similar to Graburn and Jafari's 1991 *Annals* issue, Part I begins the *Handbook* with series of chapters that summarize major disciplinary approaches to tourism studies, enlisting a mix of prominent and emerging experts in their respective fields. The chapter on anthropology (Chapter 3) – co-written by Graburn and Naomi Leite, his former student and co-founder of University of California-Berkeley's Tourism Studies Working Group – is a wonderfully crafted analysis of the major trends in this discipline, and David Telfer's excellent contribution on Development Studies and Tourism (Chapter 9) is especially helpful in understanding the complex issues at stake in this extremely important discipline. Other perspectives include sociology, cultural studies, media and popular culture studies, history, geography, business, economics, political science, hospitality and leisure, and ecology. Unfortunately, the discipline of psychology was left out (though Robinson has just co-edited an excellent book on the role of affect and emotion in tourism with his former CTCC colleague David Picard (Picard & Robinson, 2012); such a chapter would have helpfully updated Pearce and Stringer's 1991 contribution on the subject in the *Annals* issue.

Entitled "Key Topics in Tourism Studies," Part II transcends disciplinary boundaries by examining important forms and issues related to tourism from an interdisciplinary perspective. It is here that the topics of religion and religious tourism, sustainability and eco-tourism, local and regional tourism, rural tourism, urban planning and architecture – as well as problems such as safety and security, transportation, destination branding, site management, heritage, conservation, and representation – can all be found. Once again, most are written (or co-written) by recognized scholars in their fields, such as Amanda Stronza, Richard Sharpley, Rich Harrill, and Simon Woodward. Part III continues examining important topics in tourism studies from a relatively interdisciplinary perspective, but what apparently sets it apart from the previous section are the novelty and immediacy of the issues; whereas Part II examined matters of longstanding concern to tourism scholars, Part III explores critical and emerging issues such as the role of information technology in tourism, gender and sexuality, linguistics, performance studies, thanatourism (or "dark tourism," the exploration of sites of genocide and warfare), and post-colonialism. Through the criteria for choosing what constitutes "critical and emerging" is a

bit unclear, many of the chapters in this third section deal with the "hot topics" in tourism research in this era. One example is the chapter on the so-called "New Mobilities Paradigm" (NMP), co-written by the scholar who is perhaps most associated with NMP, John Urry; this represents a valuable contribution to the literature, and the book as a whole, particularly as disciplines such as anthropology have begun to draw connections between tourism and other forms of global mobility and travel such as immigration (Salazar, 2010).

Additionally, I am especially pleased that philosopher Mick Smith's humanistic chapter exploring the ethics of tourism was included in this section (Chapter 34). The co-author of an interesting volume on ethnics and tourism (Smith & Duffy, 2005), Smith engages philosophers such as Bentham, Heidegger, and Lavinias to interrogate many of the taken-for-granted ethical assumptions leveled by and against tourism planners and professionals, and asks tough questions concerning social justice, interpersonal relationships, conservation, authenticity, freedom and multiculturalism. Tourism ethics are important to consider, Smith argues, "because they make us mindful of the importance of resisting a worldview which would reduce everything to economic objects, commodities to be bought and sold, thereby losing sight of what really matters" (p. 629). This position helpfully stands in stark contrast to the preceding contribution entitled "Tourism and International Policy: Neoliberalism and Beyond" (Chapter 33), in which R. E. Wood relies on white papers and briefs (among other sources) to review tourism-related governmental and intergovernmental policies; often such policies are justified by citing ethical concerns, though they treat tourism fundamentally as an industry and are enacted through fundamentally economic programs. While Wood rather expertly discusses their history and development, the chapter could have benefitted from a more explicit interrogation of the neoliberal theories by Milton Freeman and other founding fathers of neoliberalism that underlie many of these policies. Indeed, "neoliberalism" is in the chapter title but Freeman and other neoliberal thinkers are not cited. Part III also includes a final chapter by G. R. Jennings outlining the variety of methodologies in tourism research. Jennings' contribution is valuable for understanding the history and development of tourism research methods, broadly conceived (i.e., quantitative, qualitative), but less helpful in detailing specific methodologies for researchers to employ; a discussion of ethnography – the hallmark of anthropological research – is particularly thin here.

As is quite common in compendia and handbooks of this breadth (see Di Giovine, 2011), there are bound to be some gaps, and the Sage *Handbook* is no different. While touched upon in some of the chapters, the problem of sex tourism and prostitution, and the newly emerging genres of culinary tourism, creative tourism and medical tourism could have easily been featured in dedicated chapters in this section (for "creative tourism" see a recent thematic issue of *Tourism Consumption and Practice* edited by Richards and Marques (2012); for "medical tourism" see Connell, 2011). Alternatively, a chapter or section of the introduction that enumerated the various forms of tourism currently in vogue, along with a brief discussion of how it emerged, would be apropos for a reference handbook of this size. I hasten to add, however, that the editors themselves recognized the existence of several such gaps in the volume, and their concluding chapter specifically deals with the issue of "past omissions and emergent challenges" in tourism studies head-on. Rather than being backwards-looking, summarizing the objectives and theories guiding the text, this important chapter looks to the future; it discusses the current conflicts and challenges facing tourism studies, as well as the "genuine knowledge gaps that are still to be filled by tourism researchers" (p. 694).

Jamal and Robinson's concluding chapter underscores the fact that the volume is not merely a reference manual, but is both simultaneously indexical and constitutive of the current state of tourism research. That is, I would suggest first that *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* is valuable not only for the impressive amount of collective knowledge contained within its some 700 pages, but also because it is an accurate snapshot of the culture of tourism studies roughly 50 years since its formal inception (for better or for worse!). Second, I would argue that *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* contributes to the very construction of an interdisciplinary genre of academic inquiry called "tourism studies." As Jamal and Robinson point out in their commendable introduction, the very employment of the term "tourism studies" "implies the status of a discipline or, at the very least, the aspiration to become a discipline" (1); note that Jafari's comparable volume is entitled simply the *Encyclopedia of Tourism* (rather than tourism studies), thereby contributing to the "scientification of tourism" (cf. Jafari, 2001) while still not elevating it to the status of a discipline. But Jamal and Robinson's introduction, and the volume itself, does more than simply assign a name to a body of inquiry. It makes a compelling case for the study of tourism as a holistic discipline: a global phenomenon, tourism transcends single communities, places, and even industries; it allows researchers to engage with newly emergent perspectives dealing with globalization and modernity (such as the mobilities paradigm); and it allows researchers to study tourism's meaning-making processes from the perspectives of the producers, consumers, and people caught in between – or as Jamal and Robinson write, from the perspectives of being a tourist and doing tourism (i.e., from the realm of locals, industry professionals, and others who are drawn into the field) (2).

*The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* also helps constitute the discipline of "tourism studies" processually. It does this through primarily through its explicit, often proactive, inclusionary dynamic, which literally creates the representation of a "community of scientists' whose research, voices, issues, and concerns are slowly transcending linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary barriers to find common spaces for knowledge sharing" (xix). This volume is literally one such space. On the one hand, the editors explicitly looked to cross disciplinary divides, which continue to be deeply entrenched (as evidenced by the volume's continuation of the 1991 *Annals* structure of summarizing tourism studies by discipline). On the other hand, several chapters are co-written by teams consisting of an established expert and an emergent scholar or one from an emerging (i.e., developing) country. In addition to Leite and Graburn's contribution, for example, John Urry co-writes his chapter with Slovenian doctoral student Misela Mavric, and Stephen Page co-authors his chapter with Chinese doctoral student Yue Ge. Importantly, Amanda Stronza – whose own article, "The Anthropology of Tourism" (2001) was the earliest to update Graburn's 1983 eponymous paper by integrating a thorough discussion of the then-novel "sustainable tourism" turn – co-writes her chapter on sustainability and eco-tourism with Joseph E. Mbaiwa, a prolific scholar from Botswana whose work is less cited than it should be; and heritage tourism scholar Hazel Tucker co-authors her chapter on "tourism and post-colonialism" with John Akama, a United States-educated professor from Kenya. The choice to include subaltern voices when discussing issues important to the developing world is not only beneficial to the quality of the papers, but also performs the very inclusivity that academics often accuse development practitioners of neglecting (see Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Mosse, 2005). Indeed, as I have pointed out elsewhere, much of the original literature on participatory, community-based tourism development from the 1980s and 1990s were written by development practitioners outside of the local community, whose approaches

often focused less on actual inclusion of locals in the process and more on "ensuring the industry's survival" by "managing" locals' "goodwill" and "demonstrating that benefits pass to the community as well as industry personnel" (Murphy, 1985, pp. 29, 39, 124), so as to "gain local support for tourism projects and initiatives" (Harrill, 2004, p. 251). Intentionally or not, this tourism development paradigm therefore often fosters processes of separation, rather than inclusion (see Di Giovine, 2010, pp. 213-218, 2011, pp. 273-274; cf. Murphy, 1985, p. 39), and few texts truly integrate both of these voices (cf. Sutheeshna, Mishra & Parida, 2008).

*The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* is successful on many levels. As a reference manual, it is recommended for its breadth and depth; not only is it thorough in its coverage of the major forms, issues, and theoretical perspectives on tourism, but the individual chapters themselves are original, rigorously researched, and highly readable. By bringing together a global body of established and emerging scholars from a variety of disciplines, and organizing their contributions under the single title of "tourism studies" – this *Handbook* not only symbolically underscores the editors' objective of legitimizing, if not creating, an interdisciplinary field of tourism studies, but actively builds a community of tourism researchers. This furthermore helps paint a picture of a richly textured field, one that includes anthropology, sociology, management, economics, political science, literary theory, geography, and others – yet transcends them. *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* should draw readership from each of these disciplines, and, hopefully, inspire researchers to integrate perspectives from other disciplines into their own work. In the end, it is this kind of organic interface, fostered by a recognition of the contributions of scholars from a variety of schools of thought, which will create a more unified discipline of "tourism studies" that can tackle the increasingly complexifying state of global tourism today. *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* is a step in that direction.

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